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The Merchandise of the American Indian

VAST and varied are the exports of American merchandise, but the wares of the aboriginal American find no place in the expanding foreign trade of the United States. In fact, each year there is less and less real American Indian handiwork produced and sold, and virtually none exported, so the outside world knows little of the interesting and beautiful things made by a people whose zenith has been passed—a race of primitive, child-like semi-savages that is slowly but surely being assimilated in the melting pot of the New World.

The merchandise of the American Indian is peculiar to itself, and while much of it is serviceable in one way or another, the great bulk of it is used for ornamental purposes or as mementos of visits to the Far Western States. The largest and most appreciative purchasers, however, are those who have made a study of this peculiar race of people and have formed the hobby of collecting their wares, learning the story of each article, and studying the blankets, bead work, and pottery from an ethnological viewpoint.

Classification of Indian Wares

The wares of the American Indian, viewed historically and commercially, may be divided into a number of classes. There are the relics and mementos of tribes and peoples now extinct, and there is the semi-recent work of the tribes that have inhabited the United States during the past hundred years. Most plentiful of all, however, is the handiwork of the Indians of the last few decades, although in many respects the most recent work is least sought after, because it lacks much of the crudeness and originality of the real American Indian, and is tinged too much with modern civilization.

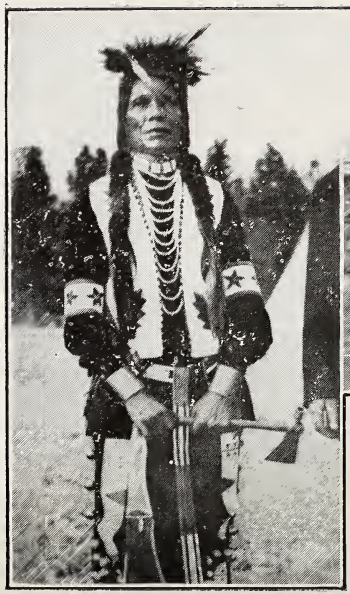
Another division of Indian merchandise may be made along the lines of usage. Some of the most valuable pieces of Indian work represent efforts on the part of the squaws to provide for themselves and their families articles of

The mystery of the lost tribes of Israel is no greater than that which surrounds the complete disappearance of the race which once inhabited a vast territory in Southwestern United States. This photograph, loaned by the Denver & Rio Grande Railway, shows the ruins of one of the largest and most interesting buildings used by the so-called Cliff Dwellers; above is a great overhanging rock and below a dizzy cañon. The relics in the immediate foreground were taken from this dwelling. The large earthenware jars were found arranged in orderly fashion in one of the inner rooms and the matting, which is still in a good state of preservation, is made of willow and yucca fiber and shows that these people were well. But of the people themselves the explorers found only a few bones and skulls.

wearing apparel, but more interesting to the collector of Indian relics are the Indian "playthings" which tell the story of the mental development of the race. The Indians, with minds much like children, express their thoughts and portray their environment largely in their games and pastimes, and the crude playthings of young and old tell the silent story of the race itself. Still another division of Indian merchandise may be made, to include the red man in art. The Indian himself is the subject, rather than the principal, however, of this division, for it has remained for those white people interested in the Indians and their habits to present the world with photographs and paintings and books depicting the mode of life, dress, and activities of the buck, squaw and papoose.

Antiquity of Indian Artcrafts

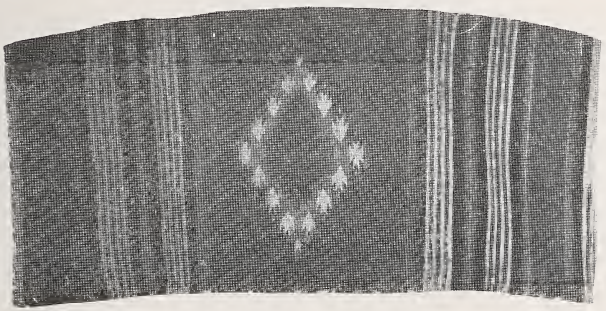
When Columbus discovered America in 1492, he found the lands he visited inhabited by strange savage tribes of copper colored people, whom he named Indians, because he believed that he had circumnavigated the globe and had reached the Indias of the Orient. Later explorers found much of the North American continent inhabited by similar peoples, and while the delusion of Columbus was dispelled, the original name of Indians remained with the races inhabiting the Americas. However, as North America became settled, evidences were discovered of other races, then extinct, which had, ages ago, roamed the mountains and prairies and plains. In the eastern and central states, these people have become known as the Mound Builders, because the chief evidence of their existence is found in numerous mounds that exist, especially in the Ohio and Mississippi river valleys. In the Southwest, they have been called Cliff Dwellers, because they built their "palaces" or villages in almost inaccessible cliffs. In the mounds and the cliff palaces have been found many interesting mementos of these peoples, such as pottery, stone implements and other handiwork, but none of the numerous explorations made thus far have revealed whence they came, when they lived, where they have gone, or why they disappeared. Articles made by them have been greatly sought after by collectors of Indian curios. There is every reason to believe that the Mound Builders and the Cliff Dwellers were entirely different peoples, possibly living in different ages, and certainly existing under most different environments and there is no reason whatever to believe that the American Indian who has been known to the white men of the last four hundred years, is even a remote descendant of



At right—Stanislaus, a Flathead Indian sub-chief, dressed up for an Indian dance. He carries a real tomahawk and wears a bead necklace and velvet shirt. Center—This is a typical Indian log cabin. At the right, suspended on poles, vegetables are being dried for the winter's use. Usually the northern Indians put up a tepee beside their log cabin for summer use. In one of these tepees, ten feet in diameter, the author found a family of six. At left—The sight of a squaw carrying her papoose on a cradle board along the streets of a western town is growing less common as the years go by

either race. These people, however, were the first American manufacturers, and their wares are eagerly sought by anthropologists who hope some day to find the Rosetta stone that will unlock the mysteries of the vanished races.

Columbus was the first importer of American Indian merchandise, when he took a few Indians and some of their gaudy trinkets back to Queen Isabella; but if history is correct, the good queen who had pawned her jewels to help the discoverer of the New World was not impressed with either the artistic or the enthnological value of the Indians or their handiwork. Her hopes were based on the tales of Marco Polo, and her dreams were of gold, silver and jewels.



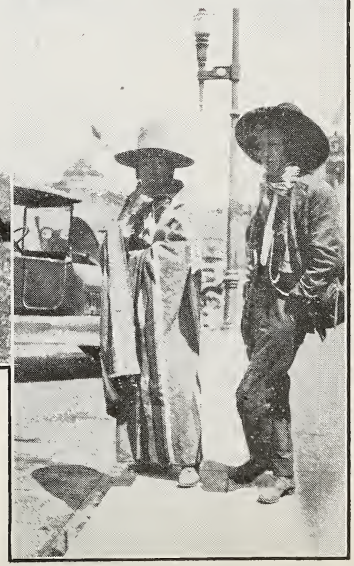
A Chimayo Mexican zarape. The squaws of this tribe weave more accurately and in designs more perfect than their distant neighbors, the Navajo

In fact, only since the American Indian has been yielding rapidly to the encroachment of the white man's civilization, has the real value of his handiwork become recognized and commercialized as merchandise to be bought and sold.

Some of the Famous Indian Blankets

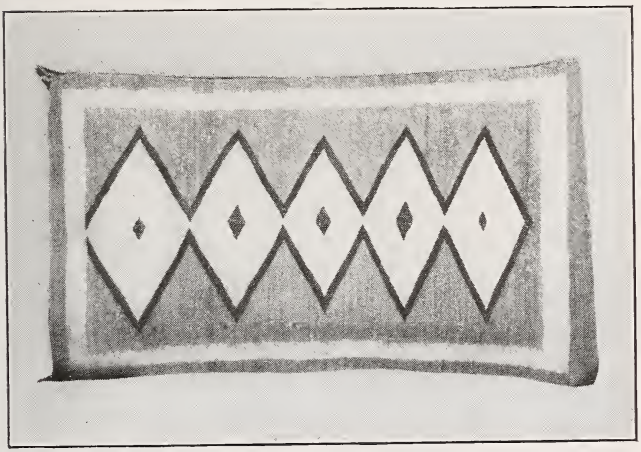
From time immemorial, the North American Indian has been a blanket race, consequently among the chief articles of Indian merchandise sought by the collector are many specimens of blanketry.

The best known Indian blankets are, without doubt, the work of the Navajo tribes of Southwestern United States, and in many American homes they are extensively used as floor rugs. For decades, perhaps for centuries, these Indians have raised sheep on the mesas and in the valleys near their villages. The squaws have sheared the sheep,



At left—An old Cree buck holding a horn hat rack which he has made; on his arm hang some buckskin bags or purses. He is wearing the white man's clothes. Center—An Indian village in Hell Gate Cañon, Montana. There is a great difference in the way different tribes build their tepees and one versed in Indian lore can easily tell by the placing of the poles, the size and shape of the covering, location of the smoke hole, etc., to what tribe the tepee belongs. At right —Two Indian bucks on the street of a western town. Both wear the popular hat of the West.

washed the wool, carded and spun the yarn, and then have woven their blankets, all in the most primitive manner. Their distaffs are rude wooden affairs, and the Navajo loom usually consists of a couple of long poles lashed with thongs across a space between two trees. The lower pole is weighted down with rocks, to tighten the warp strings that are passed over the top pole and around the lower pole, and a long blunt "batten stick" is used to hold the warp strings apart and to beat down the yarn of the woof into its proper place. Slowly and patiently the threads are woven in and out, an inch a day being considered good speed on a well woven Navajo. The designs are usually



One of the Navajo blankets in the collection of the author. A proof of a genuine Indian blanket or rug is that the crude work is irregular

symbolical, signifying those things most dear to the weaver—her church, represented by the cross, rain clouds, water courses, pine trees and serpents. Occasionally birds and animals are woven into the designs, especially the beloved thunder bird of the Indian of the arid Southwest.

The Indians of Alaska, particularly the Chilcat tribe, weave a very beautiful blanket from the wool of wild mountain sheep intertwined with fine strips of cedar bark, dyed with colors made from minerals and roots and fantastically decorated with designs aimed to portray the family history. The Alaskan Indians also make cedar bark rugs or mats, and their fur rugs or blankets are frequently works of art representing a great intrinsic value.

Somewhat similar to the Navajo work is that of the Chimayo Indians of Mexico, who make blankets, rugs and zarapes; but more interesting in design is the work of the Oaxaca Mexican Indians who often weave into their blankets forms of men and women which bear a striking

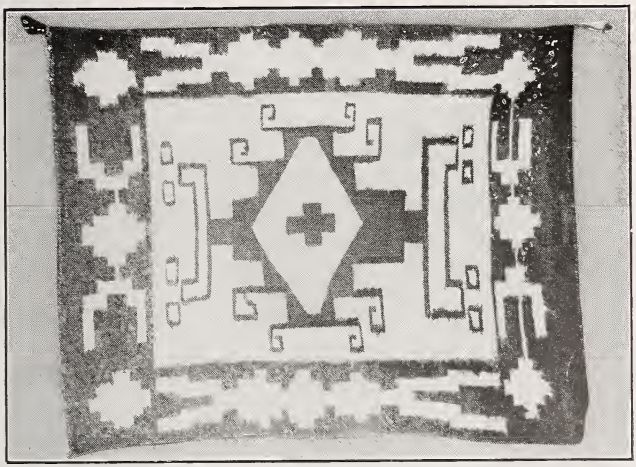
Courtesy Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fé Railway

Two poles lashed across the opening between two small trees form the rude loom upon which the Navajo squaw weaves her famous blankets

resemblance to the drawings found in ancient Egyptian tombs. Can it be that these crude Indians bear a relationship to the peoples of ancient Africa? And can it be, that, after all, there was an Atlantis by way of which they emigrated thousands of years ago to what is now Eastern Mexico or Southwestern United States?

Art Products Made from Hides and Skins

The Indians of the Northwestern part of the United States, comprising the colder Rocky Mountain regions, formerly made most of their clothing from the skin of the buffalo, but this great animal, with his wonderful coat of fur, is now extinct in his wild state, and the wild deer and elk of the Rocky Mountains provide hides used by the Indians of Montana, Idaho, Wyoming and Washington for the manufacture of moccasins, shirts, dresses, gloves, and many other articles. Modern high power rifles have displaced bows and arrows for killing big game, but the



Another Navajo blanket of a crude and striking design. Indian lore finds graphic expression in these products of an old and native industry

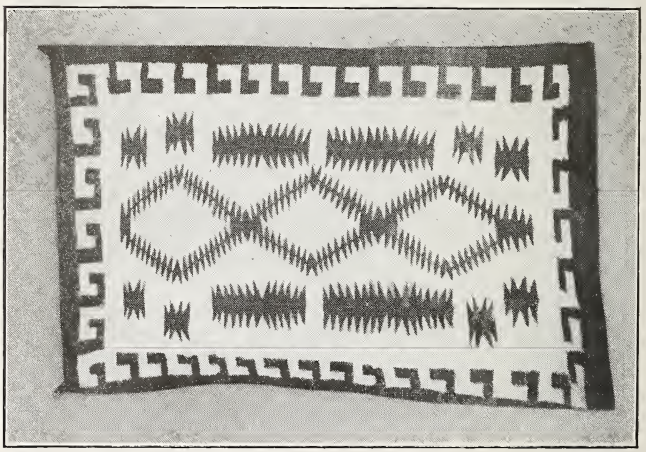
squaws of the northland still prepare the buckskin much as they did hundreds of years ago, scraping the fur from the outer side of the skin with rude bone scrapers, and smoke-tanning the hides by shaping them like miniature tepees, inside of which they build a slow fire that gradually cures the skin. Leather of wonderful fineness and flexibility is thus produced, and it will last for years with the hardest kind of usage.

Beadwork in Many Colors

Virtually all of the better work of the northern squaws is gayly decorated with beads of many colors, "store beads" having long ago taken the place of the shells and bone

beads used by the primitive red man. Strange as it may seem, the World War played havoc with the bead work of the Indians, because the supply of brilliant cut beads from Germany could no longer be obtained, and the beads purchaseable did not have the sheen and lustre of the imported article.

There are many classes of beadwork to be obtained in the north Indian countries. The Indians of the cactus and rattlesnake country, such as the Crows and Sioux, make a wonderful hard sole moccasin capable of resisting cactus thorns and the bites of venemous reptiles, while those of the mountains, such as the Pend d'Oreille and the Salish, make a soft pliable moccasin, for they have no need of the



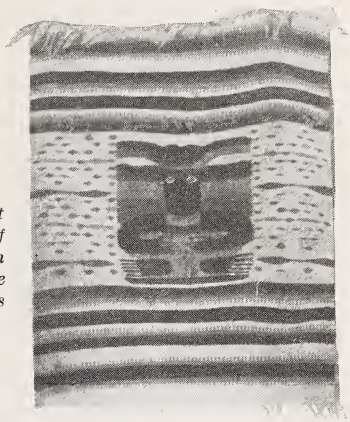
Patience is exemplified to a high degree by the Navajo rug weavers who work for many weeks in preparing the wool and making a rug of this kind

protection so necessary for other tribes. Every well-to-do buck has a pair of gloves his squaw has made him, and some have beaded buckskin vests, shirts, and leggings. They all have strings of beads, wristlets, gauntlets, belts and necklaces. For their annual dances, they decorate themselves gayly in feathered war bonnets and carry trinkets with little bells attached, colored tom-toms, and medicine rattles to ward off evils and propitiate the good spirits.

Many of these articles of Indian merchandise find their way to collectors, either when those interested in such

things visit the reservations during the dance seasons, or when the Indians become anxious for spending money and part with their treasures to replenish their supply of food or tobacco. The Indians of the Rocky Mountains make very little of their finery for commercial purposes, while those of the Southwest make most of their blankets and rugs for sale to their white visitors. In many cities of the West are curio dealers who handle Indian goods extensively, buying directly from the squaws, and selling to travelers and curio collectors.

One of the most sought after relics of the Indian race from the viewpoint of the Indian curio collector, is the cradle board or papoose carrier, usually made of beauti-



A Sioux pipe and a blanket woven by the Oaxaca tribe of Mexico. The squatty figures in the design are similar to those of ancient Egyptian decorations

fully beaded buckskin, and used as the baby carriage of an Indian family for many years. Sentiment, along with hard work making a good cradle board, usually prompts the squaw to refuse all offers for her cradle board, but now and then one finds its way into the hands of some admirer.

Pottery from the Desert Country

Pottery is another bit of Indian merchandise that is both interesting and valuable, and its manufacture is confined chiefly to the races that have lived for centuries in the hot desert-like countries of the southwestern states, not so far from the ruins of the Cliff Dwellers—who were undoubtedly America's first potsherds. Many of their prehistoric pots,

jars and vases, have been found during recent explorations, and they are almost priceless specimens in the leading museums of the United States. They are usually decorated with designs that might well have been rudely copied from the art of ancient Rome, Greece or Egypt, and cause one to ponder on the origin of this lost race and its work. The potters of present day American Indians are the Hopi, the Apache, the Pueblo and the Acoma, and while some of the work is crude, much of it is elegant and beautiful, and serves to grace the mantlepiece in many an artistic and aristocratic white man's home.

The author's library, showing the use of Indian merchandise in home decoration. The rugs are Navajo and on the table is a Chimayo zarape

Another view of the author's den, showing the decorative uses of Indian work. The Crow war bonnet on the wall is made of eagle feathers. The handiwork of ten different tribes of Indians is displayed in this one photo

Baskets Woven from Ferns, Grasses and Roots

Closely akin to the pottery of the Southland Indian is the basketry of many scattered tribes. Basket work of one kind or another is to be found from Alaska to Central America, each tribe executing distinctively different and frequently very beautiful work. Much of the northern basket work is very delicately woven from mere shreds of ferns, fine grasses, and the roots of trees. Some of the

At left—Squaws of the Nez Perce tribe. The women of the Nez Perce, the Kootenai and Pend d'Oreille know the art of weaving waterproof baskets. Center—These Indians were photographed as they sat in front of their tepee at the close of the first day of their annual Sun Dance. Some one had brought a big load of watermelons to the dance grounds and young and old were enjoying the fruit. At right—Young Flathead squaw carrying her papoose on a fine specimen of cradle board covered with buckskin and heavily beaded in red, blue and yellow

inland tribes make their baskets chiefly of sweet grass, with a wonderful natural odor, while the Pacific Coast Indians frequently weave from rushes and marsh grasses.

The Klickitat tribe makes water tight cooking baskets and the Attu Indians make a wonderfully serviceable basket by shredding rye grass for the body of the basket, into which they weave designs in gayly colored yarns. The Tillamook and Clatsop tribes make a loose weave handled basket that they call a clam basket, used originally in gathering clams, but which is now used by many American women as a shopping bag of unusual durability and attrac-

Courtesy Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fé Railway

This snapshot shows an Acoma squaw sitting in front of her plaster or adobe house, painting a geometrical design on a vase of her own modeling

tiveness. The Makah baskets are made of birch bark and sea weed, while the Papago tribes of the wild canyons and deserts of southwestern United States make beautiful basketry from the yucca and other desert plants. The Hopi and Oraibi make both baskets and trays, and many of the trays are of especial interest because they are used by the Indians primarily in their gambling games and religious ceremonial dances.

Four good examples of Indian merchandise. At the left is a corn maiden tray of the Oraibi tribe; the figure is supposed to represent a girl ready for the snake dance of this tribe. Next is a beautifully woven Hopi gambling tray or basket made of fine willows and ferns. The third piece is a Tillamok-Clatsop clam basket woven from sea plants by the daughter of the last chief of the Clatsop tribe. To the right is a hard leather "parfleh" made by a Blackfoot squaw from home tanned leather, decorated with geometrical designs

Bags Made from Buckskin, Grasses, Yarn

Somewhat similar to basket weaving, is the bag making of the Rocky Mountain tribes. The Sioux, Cheyenne, Flathead and Crowe tribes make beautiful bags of buckskin, decorated with bead work, to which are added sometimes little shells and now and then brass and silver trinkets. The Nez Perce, on the other hand, weave water proof seamless bags from grasses and yarns, while the Blackfeet and many other tribes make a "parflesh" or carrier bag, out of heavy hide, decorated with red and black geometrical designs.

Indian Games Supply Interesting Souvenirs

The Indians are lovers of games—both games of chance and trials of skill and dexterity, and the collector of Indian curios usually finds this class of Indian merchandise very interesting as well as ethnologically instructive and valuable. With many of the tribes, dice games are common—sticks, seeds, bones and leather disks marked with the proper spots, representing the dice. Hiding and guessing games, similar to the popular children's game "button, button, who's got the button," are played by almost all tribes, but instead of a button, the Indians usually use a bone toy two or three inches long. The Indians also have games similar to shuttlecock or shinny, and a few tribes have been known to play a sort of chess, the chessmen being carved by hand in a very crude way. Card games, too, are played in some tribes, and playing cards made of bark are among the most interesting efforts of the Indian to imitate his white brother. It is not an infrequent thing for ten or a dozen bucks to gamble for days and wager all their horses, cattle, and even their clothing on a throw of dice, or the guess in the hiding game.

In the games of dexterity, such as hurling darts and javelins and shooting arrows, some of the Indians become very expert, and these articles are highly prized by curio collectors.

Unlike many primitive peoples, the American Indian has made little or no effort to express his thoughts in any form of writing or hieroglyphics, although he is a great story teller, and legendary history has been handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. A few tribes have portrayed events in their histories by poorly drawn pictures on rocks and caves, but these, of course, are not accessible to the curio collector.

Totem Poles of Alaska

The Indians of Alaska, however, produce what are known as totem poles, and on these they at least tell in a general way the story of the family or clan which owns the pole. A totem pole is a log, stripped of its bark, and carved, by hand, with grotesque likenesses of people, animals, fish and birds, decorated in brilliant water proof colors made from herbs and minerals. The carvings tell of the prowess of the head of the tribe and are symbolical of marriages, hunting trips, peace, war and other events. The poles vary in height from a few feet to seventy or eighty feet, and some of them are hundreds of years old. They are much sought after by students of Indian lore, but as the Indians hold them in a certain reverential awe, they rarely will part with an old family pole, and clandestine efforts on the part of over enthusiastic curio hunters in Alaska, have upon several occasions caused the curio seekers considerable trouble with the Indians.

In the Indian villages of the far north, these poles stand before the chief tribal tepees, and they have caused students to wonder what connection there may or may not be between the Indians of Alaska and the barbaric races of the South Sea Islands and the Urewera country of New Zealand, for strange as it may seem, there is almost identical similarity between the totem poles of the Alaskan Indians and the carved "family tree-posts" found in a few of the wildest parts of the antipodes. At some far distant period, have some of the hardy sea folk of Oceanica drifted to the cold shores of Alaska, there to establish new homes and to re-establish a form of ancestor worship nowhere else known? So striking a coincidence seems hardly an accident and the origin of the Alaskan Indian is as much an anthropological mystery as the forebears of the other aboriginal American tribes.

Civilization Doing away with Primitive Artcrafts

The North American Indian, like most of the rest of mankind in this century, is undergoing a great change. No longer is he free to go and come as he will, and no longer is he looked upon as a wild animal to be herded and driven from one part of the great west to another. His humanity is recognized, and the United States Department of Indian Affairs is endeavoring to train the red man to become a useful citizen. He is given an opportunity to receive an education, he is taught to farm and to raise cattle, and

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his squaw is told that she is no longer the beast of burden of the Indian family.

But fortunately, the story of the Indian as he was, has been preserved in the writings of Cooper, Longfellow, Leland, Grinnell, James, Judson—the writers for the Smithsonian Institution, and a number of others who best understand real Indian lore. The Indian as a virile being has been presented to posterity in the paintings of Remington, Paxson, Russell and others. Books on the Indian form a real and vital part of the merchandise of the American Indian, but the paintings as a rule are far beyond the reach of the average buyer. There has, however, sprung up a class of commercial photographers throughout the western states, that has made it possible for the student of the Indian to buy at very reasonable prices many splendid photos of the red men in their dances, their games and their home life.

Their chants and their songs have been recorded faithfully by some of the leading phonograph and talking machine manufacturers and the motion pictures have given thousands an opportunity to witness Indian dances on the screen, very nearly true to real life.

Thus will be perpetuated the memory and activities of the people whose lives are changing very rapidly. Indian curios, mementos and souvenirs, with the books and the pictures, will thus make possible to the world in general, and to future generations of Americans, at least a slight understanding of the lives of these primitive, interesting people, even when real American Indian merchandise can no longer be obtained.

An Alaskan totem pole. The top figure represents a large bird, next is the likeness of a great chieftain, then a bear and a gull holding a frog

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